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Should the Humanities Be Slow?

Abstract: In this paper I present an understanding of the humanities from the perspective of cultural ontology. In the introduction, I specify the perspective from which I am conducting my reflections, synthetically characterise how cognition is understood on its grounds, and introduce a characterisation of the humanities as relating to meaning. In what follows, I show why, from the point of view of cultural ontology, the humanities are practical. In dialogue with other concepts, I introduce the notions of ontological imagination, mindfulness, *phronesis*, *parrhesia*, (etho)ecology. With a view to the relationship between the humanities and practical rationality, I try to show why it should be a slow science.

Keywords: humanities, cultural ontology, ontological imagination, mindfulness, phronesis, parrhesia, ethoecology, slow science

My Perspective

I approach issues related to the humanities from a particular perspective, namely cultural ontology. This concept was proposed by Barbara Tuchańska as a transformation of the project of socio-historical ontology created by her and James E. McGuire for understanding science and its development. The transformation of the socio-historical ontology into cultural ontology is a consequence of the reflection on the humanities, art and human action/creation.[1]

Cultural ontology is not a substance ontology but belongs to the post-Heideggerian ontologies of being. It is therefore interested in "how" something is, rather than "what" something is. At the same time, it abandons Heidegger's individualist

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1. The core texts are James E. McGuire and Barbara Tuchańska, *Science Unfettered. A Philosophical Study in Sociohistorical Ontology* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000); Barbara Tuchańska, "Ontologia kulturowa — zarys konstrukcji," *Diametros* 41 (2014), 127–151; Barbara Tuchańska, "Ontologia kulturowa: kulturowość bycia," *Diametros* 42 (2014), 262–289. I dealt with the humanities in the perspective of cultural ontology in the book Marcin M. Bogusławski, *Humanistyka z perspektywy ontologii kulturowej* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2018). I also reconstruct the assumption of cultural ontology in the context of art history in the article "Art History as a Thick Discipline," trans. Dawid Misztal, *Art Inquiry. Recherches sur les arts* XXIV (2022), 51–71.

perspective in the direction of a social, historical and cultural ontology. Instead, it retains a hermeneutic character. As Tuchańska and McGuire write:

> Assuredly, this does not imply a search for universally valid concepts, but rather a search for concepts that refer to our ways of being and which are filled with various contents at different times. Our aim in reconstituting the concept of scientific cognition is to find those ontological structures that are conditions of (scientific) cognition as a sociohistorical enterprise.[2]

Among the central concepts of cultural ontology is the notion of practice. The reference to practice as a category of relevance is, of course, nothing new in epistemology or philosophy of science, to mention – by way of example – Louis Althusser, Jerzy Kmita, Leszek Nowak or Isabelle Stengers. In the context of cultural ontology, however, it is used in a different way. Above all, practice is understood here as a way of being of communities, "a multidimensional whole in which each subpractice exists in interrelation with other subpractices." It is not a simple sum of the activities of individuals, just as communities are more than the simple sum of the individuals who constitute them, although they are neither substances nor "a field of forces considered in analogy with natural forces."[3] The ontological (in the sense adopted here) characterisation of communities indicates that the characteristics of their modes of being include openness, changeability and internal tensions. "Individual participation in a community is simultaneously an activity of making the community. A community's embracement of its members as persons is also a process of shaping them into agents and actors."[4]

Practice is the way in which communities and their participants are constituted, since they exist historically, which on an ontological level involves finiteness and succession of generations.

> If there is no permanent, supra-historical human nature or universal determinants of human action, then it is characterised by unpredictability. [...] In turn, the fact that human action and community practice are self-constituted means that nothing and no one guarantees their beginning, their proper course, and the achievement of their goals, and this means that they are characterised by irremovable uncertainty. Finally, individual finitude and the succession of generations make action and practice irreversible.[5]

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2. McGuire and Tuchańska, *Science Unfettered*, 139.
3. Both quotes: McGuire and Tuchańska, *Science Unfettered*, 135.
4. McGuire and Tuchańska, *Science Unfettered*, 104.
5. Barbara Tuchańska, "Historyczność nauki ujęta inaczej," in *Ideały nauki i konflikty wartości. Studia złożone w darze Profesorowi Stefanowi Amsterdamskiemu*, ed. Ewa Chmielecka, Jerzy

Cognition is one aspect of practice that is subject to autonomisation in the course of history, resulting in the formation of a (sub)practice of science, for which cognition is the most important activity, although not the only one.[6] The process of (self)constitution of sciences is not guided by any supra-historical developmental regularities, its course therefore cannot be rigorously predicted. One of the steps in this process is the autonomisation of science in relation to philosophy, as well as a dispute internal to science about its identity, of which the problem of the autonomy of the humanities is an important part. Cultural ontology is a position that tries not to disregard the modern separation of science and philosophy, and therefore does not undertake the tasks that are served by science (such as explanation and prediction).[7] At the same time, it cannot ignore the fact that an important part of the history of the human sciences is their autonomisation from the natural sciences, which it must take into account in its understanding of the humanities.

What Does Cultural Ontology Recognise about Cognition?

From the perspective of cultural ontology, cognition is recognised as situated and historical, dialogical, axiological and cultural. Cognition is situated and historical because it is done from within the historically changing world in which we live as finite individuals. It has a dialogical structure in the hermeneutic sense of dialogue, that is, it takes place in relations and interactions in which meanings are formed, stabilised or transformed. Dialogicity understood in this way does not exhaust itself in conversation, but includes, for example, relations with measurement instruments, methodological traditions, etc. It also involves circularity: understanding grows out of and refers to a tradition, but the tradition exists only insofar as it is actualised in understanding.[8] Cognition is axiological and cultural because it takes place from within a tradition shaped by axiologically and culturally structured communities, and acts of understanding reveal meanings towards which we must take a stance (e.g., accept or reject them). At a factual level, this characterisation is reflected in the entanglement of scientific practice with

Jedlicki, and Andrzej Rychard (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Szkoła Nauk Społecznych przy IFiS PAN, 2005), 57. Quote translated by Dawid Misztal.

6. McGuire and Tuchańska, *Science Unfettered*, 111.

7. Barbara Tuchańska, "Problem filozoficzności filozofii nauki," *Studia Filozoficzne* 1, 278 (1989), 114.

8. James E. McGuire and Barbara Tuchańska, "Sytuacja poznawcza — analiza ontologiczna," in *Porozumiewanie się i współpraca uczonych*, ed. Janusz Goćkowski and Marek Sikora (Kraków: Wydawnictwo i Drukarnia Secesja, 1997), 152 ff.

different and historically variable types of rationality, such as conceptual, methodological, practical or axiological rationality.[9] They are not separate from each other but interact with each other. The unveiling of some meaning is arrived at in a certain way (practical rationality, related to the choice of method and purpose of the study, methodological rationality). To become comprehensible to others, it must be presented in a comprehensible manner (conceptual rationality). There must be reasons behind accepting or rejecting a given meaning, among which, in relation to science, the assessment of cognitive value (axiological rationality) plays an important role. The way in which the different types of rationality are linked creates a network of science-specific commitments. At the same time, the effective practice of science involves both the acceptance of these commitments and the ability to transcend them. This situation is recognised in cultural ontology as a circle of individuality and conformity, in which both elements – developing one's individuality and being influenced by the community – condition and shape one's participation in scientific practice.[10]

What Does Cultural Ontology Recognise about the Humanities?

From the perspective of cultural ontology, the difference between the natural sciences and the humanities becomes apparent at the level of practice. As Tuchańska notes, the distinction between the two is subtle but important. While natural sciences involve the practice of relating to what is meaningful, humanities involve the practice of relating to meaning.[11] The notion of meaning, which Tuchańska uses, was developed through a critical reading of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. In Tuchańska's view, it has two aspects: reference and sense. Senses provide entities with intelligibility, differentiate ways of being, etc. A particular variety of senses are values that cannot be objectified. Axiological oppositions are the structures of communal being, and values themselves are experienced in acts of understanding, which are always axiological.[12]

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9. I adopt the terminology of Ryszard Kleszcz from his book *O Racjonalności. Studium epistemologiczno-metodologiczne* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1998). An extensive analysis of the concept of rationality and its different types can be found there.

10. See: McGuire and Tuchańska, *Science Unfettered*, 150.

11. Barbara Tuchańska, "Nieuniwersalność praw nauki, historyczność wszystkiego i specyfika humanistyki," *Prace Kulturoznawcze* XI (2010), 24.

12. See: Tuchańska, *Ontologia kulturowa: kulturowość*, 267–271; Barbara Tuchańska, "Czy Latourowskie badanie sposobów egzystowania pozwala zrozumieć wartości i ich rolę w naszym życiu?," *Prace Kulturoznawcze* XVIII (2015), 81–97.

The practice of natural sciences obscures (purifies) the processes of giving meaning to the elements of nature, imposing an obligation on the researcher to use nature itself to settle scientific controversies or legitimise the results of research. This requirement, which Stengers argues, is not apparent from a social constructivist perspective, protects natural science from attempts to reduce its practice to a struggle of interests, ambition or conspiracy by a group of scholars.[13] However, it renders invisible "the influence exerted on the object of study by the researchers, by their predilections and [...] intellectual passions, and by the conceptual and measuring tools used in the study."[14] The human being becomes the object of interest of these sciences precisely as an object, for example, a system of biochemical processes.[15]

The situation is different for the humanities. Their object is that, whose "ontological structure is meanings," and the mode of being of the humanities is the interpretative relating to meanings, although at the level of practice "interpretation in the hermeneutic sense is only one form of humanistic inquiry (understanding)."[16] Its indispensable element is the reflection on the processes of the formation of meanings, their stabilisation, their transformation, that is, what the practice of the natural sciences purifies. As the processes of making and assigning meanings are exposed, so is the figure of the researcher, who is the indispensable pole of the cognitive relation, since

> he does not occupy the position of a passive observer, but constitutes the object of his cognition, giving it meaning. At the same time, he defines itself existentially (takes an active stance) in relation to what he comes to know. The humanist is distinguished by the fact that he relates to senses and at the same time to his own prejudices, structured by values and senses.[17]

This links the humanities to the realm of the mutable, of what can be different, an area that Aristotle associated with the practical intellect and *phronesis*. More on this later.

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13. See: Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis–London: University of Minessota Press, 2010), 50 ff..

14. Tuchańska, *Nieuniwersalność praw nauki*, 25.

15. Anti-anthropocentrism as a specific requirement for objectivity in natural sciences is analysed by Zdzisława Piątek in her book *Aspekty antropocentryzmu* (Kraków: Nakładem Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1986).

16. Tuchańska, *Nieuniwersalność praw nauki*, 26.

17. Bogusławski, *Humanistyka z perspektywy*, 21.

The Practicality of the Humanities

Stanisław Kamiński notes that pitting theoretical sciences against practical sciences is perhaps the most controversial element of science theory.[18] This opposition, he writes, is expressed in various ways, for example, as the opposition of pure and applied sciences, basic and service sciences, descriptive and prescriptive sciences, or as the opposition of science and technology. In his view, these and the other oppositions he cites indicate that "the practical disciplines constitute some kind of peculiarity among the sciences."[19] I would venture to say that nowadays the disciplines considered to be *strictly* theoretical, that is, those that cannot be easily linked either to the production of technological innovations or to the business-economic environment, seem peculiar. This understanding of the practicality of sciences is linked, among other things, to the fact that the constitutive elements of natural science are "empiricism and technological engagement, for it is the experienced reality and the practical activity directed at mastering the world that compel the development of science."[20] And since "science, like mythical consciousness and religion before it, is a totalising cognitive practice," namely one that permeates the whole of social life and aspires to be the exclusive cognitive authority, the kind of practicality that characterises it is also subject to totalisation.[21]

Meanwhile, sciences can be practical in different ways and to different degrees, an awareness of which was stored in the Aristotelian tradition.[22]

For Aristotle,[23] *praxis* essentially means the sphere of action, the purpose of which is not external to the action and the agent. This is how it differs from the production-oriented *poiesis*, although the distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* is not always consistent. Alongside these, Aristotle also distinguishes *theoria*, or the cognitive activity oriented towards cognition itself. *Theoria* may include

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18. Stanisław Kamiński, *Nauka i metoda. Pojęcie nauki i klasyfikacja nauk*, ed. Andrzej Bronk SVD (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1992), 300.

19. Kamiński, *Nauka i metoda*, 301.

20. Tuchańska, *Problem filozoficzności*, 116.

21. Tuchańska, *Historyczność nauki*, 67. See: Mariola Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości. Projekt onto-epistemologii społecznej* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2015), 15–46. The English translation of this book was published in 2023, after I had written the article, and I do not have access to this publication. See: Mariola Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *A Social Onto-Epistemology*, trans. Maciej Smoczyński (Berlin–Lausanne–Bruxelles–New York–Oxford–Warszawa: Peter Lang GmbH, 2023).

22. Kamiński, *Nauka i metoda*, 304.

23. Jerzy Kalinowski, *Teoria poznania praktycznego* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1960), 12–15; Kamiński, *Nauka i metoda*, 304; Aleksandra Mathiesen, "Rozum praktyczno-wytwórczy w Arystotelesowkiej koncepcji władz duszy," *Peitho/ Examina Antiqua* 1, 8 (2017), 359–369.

non-theoretical activities that play a supporting role. Similarly, *praxis* and *poiesis* encompass cognitive activities concerning what is possible to do (*operabile* in scholastic terminology) and what is possible to produce (*factibile*). He also links all of them with truthfulness, which, however, manifests itself differently in the order of theoretical cognition and in the order of practical cognition, which is related to Aristotle's perceived difference between theoretical rationality and practical-creative rationality. While *praxis* and *poiesis* can also become the object of theoretical cognition, the reverse is not possible, as Kalinowski illustrates with the example of a bacterium: we can know its behaviour, but its rules are *operabile* only for bacteria.[24]

How to translate these distinctions into the order of knowledge and science? An interesting proposal can be found in *De Veritate*, III, 3 by Thomas Aquinas.[25] Although, following Aristotle, he distinguishes theoretical cognition (*cognitio speculativa*) from practical cognition (*cognitio practica*), at the same time he points out that in the order of theoretical cognition we can obtain knowledge of two kinds. The first relates to things whose nature cannot be produced by the cogniser's knowledge, for example, natural things. I believe that this kind of knowledge is theoretical in the strictest sense.

> Second, it may happen that the thing known is something that is producible through knowledge but is not considered as producible; for a thing is given existence through a productive operation, and there are certain realities that can be separated in understanding although they cannot exist separately.[26]

Also in the order of practical cognition, Aquinas makes a distinction between *virtual practical knowledge*, that is, knowledge on the basis of which we are able to perform something but do not take action, and *actual practical knowledge*, which is put into practice. I set aside the question of cognition resulting in theoretical knowledge of the first kind. It requires a separate problematisation, but, I believe, is not related to the humanities issue that interests me in this text. In contrast, the three remaining types of knowledge are associated with the humanities and all give the humanities a practical dimension.

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24. Kalinowski, *Teoria poznania*, 15.

25. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan SJ, III, 3,co. Thomas Aquinas: Quaestiones disputatae de veritate: English (https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/QDdeVer3.htm) (10.07.2022); Thomas de Aquino, *De Veritate*, III, 3 corpus, Thomas de Aquino, Quaestiones disputatae de veritate, q. 2–4 (https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/qdv02.html) (10.07.2022); see: Kalinowski, *Teoria poznania*, 33–34.

26. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, III, 3,co.

This becomes apparent when we realise that working on meanings is not ontologically innocent. Since in meanings (senses and, among them, values), the ways of being of entities are revealed, by referring to meanings the humanist researcher refers to that which structures the reality in which they live (including themselves). The understanding it produces not only expands their consciousness, but also relates to community practice.[27] If the meanings that are unveiled are not something that enslaves the researcher, but something that demands an attitude (affirmation or rejection), then the researcher must "take responsibility for what he or she unveils in the act of interpretation."[28] We are confronted with such a situation already at the level of the study of language, where (although not only there), as Maria Kostyszak reminds us, an axiological space is shaped, inextricably linking the past (what is worth preserving?), the present (selection) and the future (what kind of tomorrow to build?).[29] A humanist researcher may not be directly interested in influencing community practice, but this does not mean that the theoretical knowledge they produce does not have an impact in this way.

To put it differently, the ontological imagination in the sense proposed by Andrzej W. Nowak is inextricably correlated with the practice of the humanities. It provides a set of tools to follow the processes of the formation of a supposedly "unquestionable 'social entity,'"[30] and thus the stabilisation and petrification of the networks of relations and interactions that constitute it. Exposing the process allows us to look at its components, to model alternative outputs, to come up with proposals for change. From the perspective of cultural ontology, it can be seen that, in essence, any recognition of meanings, their affirmation, transformation or negation put forward by the researcher, is a proposal as to what a fragment of our shared world should look like, for meanings are related to the construction, transformation and breaking of relational links.

This links the ontological imagination to an openness to the future, but in a different sense to that of foresight in the nomological sciences.[31] The radicalism of Nowak's projected ontological imagination consists in going down to the roots

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27. Bogusławski, *Humanistyka z perspektywy*, 141.

28. Bogusławski, *Humanistyka z perspektywy*, 141.

29. Maria Kostyszak, *Spór z językiem. Krytyka ontoteologii w pismach Nietzschego, Heideggera i Derridy* (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Arboretum, 2010), 252.

30. Andrzej W. Nowak, *Wyobraźnia ontologiczna. Filozoficzna (re)konstrukcja fronetycznych nauk społecznych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2016), 338.

31. This difference was well captured by Stanisław Kamiński: "It is only when knowledge concludes the approval or disapproval of what is to come that it acquires the characteristics of practical cognition (so it not only deals with what will be, but also controls and directs processes)." (Kamiński, *Nauka i metoda*..., 303).

of the current structure of our common life, subjecting them to critical analysis, pointing out changes about the validity of which one can never be sure and the introduction of which one must watch carefully and critically.[32] Going beyond Nowak's terminology, it can be said that correlated with the ontological imagination, the practice of the humanities is a transgressive activity. For "[t]ransgression is an action which involves the limit, the narrow zone of a line where it displays the flesh of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses."[33] The opening (transgressing) and closing of boundaries, which are indispensable elements of the movement of transgression, link transgressing and stabilising. This peculiar dialectic of transgression counteracts the slide into chaos (permanent volatility) and the dogmatic maintenance of the *status quo*. However, which meanings to affirm and which to reject, which networks to uphold and which to propose the correction of, remains a matter of *phronesis* and not of apodictically certain cognition,[34] and therefore exposes the researcher to risk and makes him or her responsible for the recognitions made.

The Humanities versus Social Sciences

The concept of ontological imagination, along with Kuszyk-Bytniewska's concept of field and interactional domain,[35] make it possible to take up an issue hitherto unanalysed in cultural ontology: the relationship of the humanities to the social sciences. The attempt to separate them can be motivated in different ways. Stanisław Pietraszko, Andrzej Bronk and Stanisław Majdański are very right when they point out that one of the reasons for this is the attempt to show that these disciplines are closer to natural science than humanities and therefore, declaratively, methodologically more mature or theoretically more advanced.[36] However, the attempt to practise social science on the basis of the natural science

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32. Nowak, *Wyobraźnia ontologiczna*, 338–339, 205–206.
33. Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. and ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 33–34.
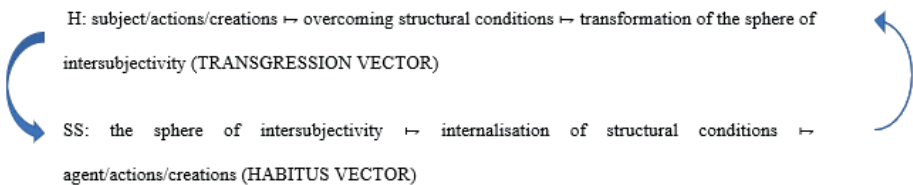34. I discuss the concept of *phronesis* later in the text.
35. See: Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości*, 202 ff.
36. See: Stanisław Pietraszako, "Granice zastosowań wiedzy humanistycznej," in Stanisław Pietraszko, *Kultura. Studia teoretyczne i metodologiczne* (Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Kulturoznawcze, 2012), 356–359; Andrzej Bronk and Stanisław Majdański, "Kłopoty z porządkowaniem nauk," *Nauka* 1 (2009), 64.

model and its associated epistemology raises serious objections.[37] In another view, the social sciences belong to the humanities *sensu largo*, and their specificity is evidenced by the opposite vector of interest in relation to the more narrowly conceived humanities. Such a proposal is formulated by Kuszyk-Bytniewska:

> The peculiarity of the human sciences in relation to the social sciences lies to a large extent in the fact that the former seek, analyse, describe, and interpret phenomena in such a way that they retain individual characteristics, even when located in the context of the phenomena of the anonymous social, semiotic, mental, etc. sphere. The social sciences, on the other hand, go in the opposite direction in relation to the humanities – they describe the regularities of sets of phenomena (social, semiotic, mental, etc.), transferring knowledge about them to the sphere of individual understanding of them.[38]

I would like to propose the following translation of Kuszyk-Bytniewska's proposal:

H: subject/actions/creations ↦ overcoming structural conditions ↦ transformation of the sphere of intersubjectivity (TRANSGRESSION VECTOR)

SS: the sphere of intersubjectivity ↦ internalisation of structural conditions ↦ agent/actions/creations (HABITUS VECTOR)

The two approaches seem to me to be circularly related, and as such they seem to me to be an indispensable part of the humanities. Their interrelation makes it possible to uncover the network structure of intersubjectivity, to trace the relations between social field structures and habitus, but also to uncover the capacity of individuals to transcend habitus and transform the existing structure of the common world. Through this link, the need to use both the concept of agent and the concept of subject in the analysis is also apparent. At the same time, the concept of agent does not refer exclusively to the human being, as not only he or she is entitled to agency. It is different with the concept of subject, which I understand as "an anthropological virtuality, a human quality — the capacity to be Subject – and this is realized, or not, in processes of subjectification which are processes

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37. See: Helena Kozakiewicz, "Epistemologia tradycyjna a problemy współczesności," in *Pogranicza epistemologii*, ed. Józef Niżnik (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1992), 155–180; Helena Kozakiewicz, *Zwierciadło społecznego świata* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991); Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości*.

38. Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości*, 49.

of self-transformation taken on by the people themselves."[39] As Alain Touraine shows, this involves an "effort of to transform a lived situation into free action."[40] The distinction between "agent" and "subject" also recognises that the researcher can (and should) recognise the agency of various entities, yet the principles of their action do not become his or her own *operabile*.

The Humanities: Mindfulness, *Phronesis*, *Parrhesia*, Ecology

Following Maria Kostyszak, I associate the ethos of mindfulness with an attempt to situate oneself "close to the world," in proximity to individual and collective experience, which, if understood onto-epistemologically, makes visible the processes that constitute our shared world.[41] Being "close to the world" is linked to the specific locality of the humanities, which can be described in the words of Pierre Bourdieu:

> the deepest logic of the social world can be grasped only if one plunges into the particularity of an empirical reality, historically located and dated, but with the objective constructing it as a special case of what is possible, as Bachelard put it, that is, as an exemplary case in a finite world of possible configurations.[42]

The efficient, and therefore also mindful, operation of the ontological imagination involves the ability to keep track of the local in order to do justice to the historical reality of place and time, while at the same time creating points of reference for comparative analysis. Mindfulness also extends to the issue of language – I agree with Kostyszak that axiological spaces are constructed in language and that linguistic habits, the meanings, hierarchies and oppositions present in language, are not indifferent either to the shape of our shared world or to us as individuals. If so, the diversity of languages implies that they create (partly) different axiological spaces, requiring reflection on what is worth preserving and what needs to be changed. This is why I see the necessity of doing humanities not only in the modern lingua franca that is English, but also in other languages.

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39. Michel Wieviorka, *Neuf leçons de sociologie* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, S.A., 2008), 30.

40. Alain Touraine, *Qu'est-ce que la démocratie ?* (Paris: Fayard, 1994), 23, quoted in: Wieviorka, *Neuf*, 17.

41. Kostyszak, *Spór*, 251, see: Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości*, 123.

42. Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason. On the Theory of Action*, trans. Randal Johnson and others (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

By its very nature, the humanities are associated with *phronesis*, or practical rationality.[43] Following Aristotle, I associate it with the ability to reflect on action and on what is changeable, what can be other than it is. An essential feature of this reflection is the ability to distinguish between what is good and bad, desirable and undesirable, as well as the ability to recognise the right time (*kairos*) for action and the appropriate forms of relating to others.[44] Following the concept of Bert Flyvbjerg, who updated the notion of *phronesis* for the social sciences, Nowak emphasises the radical positioning of practical rationality, which is at the same time a *know how*, *know why*, and *know when and were*.[45] As such, it "requires working on two levels: axiology and ontology"[46]: delineating spheres of necessity and possibility can only be done if we can recognise the structures of the common world in which agents and subjetcs are embedded.[47] This means that *phronesis* is interpretative in nature. It starts, as Kuszyk-Bytniewska writes, from some state of affairs, which it interprets from within its own positioning.[48] *Phronesis* is also autopoietic in nature, that is, it expands the capacity of subjects to act in their lifeworld, "shapes the subjectivity of action, individualises it and limits the efficiencies that guide choices."[49]

Mindfulness, *phronesis* and entanglement in the circle of transgression-habitus link the humanities to *parrhesia*.[50] In the most general terms, *parrheisa* means sincerity linked to courage. What is important here is not only the utterance of the truth, but also, and perhaps above all, how it is uttered. Michel Foucault has shown that the "how" of *parrhesia* is about unveiling the direct relationship of the one who speaks to the truth he or she utters, which means taking responsibility for that truth, up to and including a willingness to suffer the consequences. If the

43. See: Andrzej W. Nowak, *Podmiot, system, nowoczesność* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza); Nowak, *Wyobraźnia*; Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości*; Maria Kostyszak, *Personal Ethics. On the Transforming Potential of Art. And Technology* (Warszawa: Collegium Civitas, 2019).

44. See: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. William D. Ross, 1140 a 24 – 1142 b 31, 1143 b 21 ff. http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html (14.07.2022), Aristotle, *Ethica Eudemia*, trans. J. Solomon (Oxford: The Clanderon Press, 1915), 1245 a 13.

45. Nowak, *Wyobraźnia*, 72.

46. Nowak, *Wyobraźnia*, 73.

47. Nowak *Podmiot*, 265. Nowak does not employ the agent-subject distinction that I use.

48. Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości*, 191.

49. Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości*, 190.

50. I summarise here my reflections, presented in: Marcin M. Bogusławski, *Wariacje (post)-humanistyczne* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2020), 120–123; from Foucault's texts see especially: Michel Foucault, *Le Gouvernement de soi et des autres. Cours au Collège de France (1982–1982)*, ed. Frédéric Gros (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2008). See: Michał Kowalczyk, "Prawda jako narzędzie transgresji. Parezja a postawa nowoczesności w filozofii Michela Foucaulta," *Hybris* 44 (2019), 66–85, https://magazynhybris.com/images/teksty/44/H.44.05.Kowalczyk.pdf (16.07.2022).

recognition made from the perspective I have adopted is correct and the researcher in a hermeneutic situation refers directly to the meanings in relation to which he or she occupies a particular position, this reference takes on the character of a personal relationship, and he or she is responsible for which meanings he or she rejects, transforms or affirms and as such (wisely or unwisely) releases into social circulation. In order to be intelligible, this relationship must be articulated in an intersubjectively intelligible, straightforward manner, which attests to Foucault's belief in the zero degree of rhetorical figures in *parrhesia*. In relation to the humanities, *parrhesia* does not, of course, imply a requirement to practise something along the lines of confession, although it may approach this forms in certain kinds of autoethnography (in which case the practice of *parrhesia* seems most easily grasped). Rather, it takes the form of an ethical obligation that includes, inter alia, the requirement for research integrity, awareness of one's own position, including entanglement in *tacit knowledge*, which cannot be fully self-critically disclosed, responsibility for the recognitions made and the consequences resulting from them.

The environmentalism of the humanities seems to me a handy umbrella term to collect the inspirations coming from the "new humanities,"[51] "posthumanities," the humanities: "environmental," "green," "blue," "biohumanities," etc. This is possible with a sufficiently broad understanding of ecology, such as that proposed by Lech Witkowski.[52] One could perhaps say that for him ecology is a matter of *oikos* and its inhabitants: one never inhabits only nature or only culture, technology is not external to the shape of our common world, and the environment has both a material and an immaterial dimension. The stakes of the environmental approach are therefore a reflection, I will call it diagnostic, on the condition of our common world and its inhabitants, to articulate proposals for change and to act (*phronesis*!). The link between the humanities and ecology also seems attractive to me for a less obvious reason. Witkowski diagnoses that

> [e]cology nowadays seems neither to be a coherent, nor even gradually approaching a coherent area of human action, solutions and thinking, but is at best a space of dispersion,

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51. Ryszard Nycz has updated the mapping of the currents of the new humanities, also in the Polish context. See: Ryszard Nycz, "The New Humanities in Poland: A Few Subjective Observations, Conjectures, and Criticisms," trans. David Schauffler, *Er(r)go. Theory – Literature – Culture* 43 (2021), 315–338.

52. Lech Witkowski, "O nową postać ekologii," in Lech Witkowski, *Humanistyka stosowana. Wirtuozeria, pasje, inicjacje. Profesje społeczne versus ekologia kultury* (Kraków: Impuls, Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu w Dąbrowie Górniczej, 2018), 627–657.

a conglomerate of spheres and disparate aspirations, not translating into a new quality of our being civilised and the cultural consciousness of society.[53]

This dispersion, it seems to me, is interesting because it challenges, provokes, questions the ingrained habits that influence how we think and act. At the same time, the ecological perspective that Witkowski proposes does not lose sight of the human being, whom he grasps in his duality: from the side of relationship and from the side of stabilisation. Expressing this in language close to ANT, we can say that human beings simultaneously become in relationships and interactions in which not only humans but also nonhumans causally act on them, and that human beings are black boxes (again I will use a term from ANT), are "certain way," in that they are able to relate to themselves in a self-reflexive way.

I associate Stengers's proposed concepts of ecology of practices and etho-ecology with ecological humanism. The ecology of practices is a tool to explore what happens in a way that comes close to Gilles Deleuze's concept of "thinking par le milieu." Stengers emphasises that "le milieu" means both "throught the middle" and "with the surroundings." This means that there are no cognitive perspectives that allow one to disentangle oneself from the local concreteness of the environment one is studying.[54] Therefore,

> an ecology of practice is a tool for thinking through what is happening, and a tool is never neutral. A tool can be passed from hand to hand, but each time the gesture of taking it in hand will be a particular one – the tool is not a general means, defined as adequate for a set of particular aims, potentially including the one of the person who is taking it, and it does not entail a judgement on the situation as justifying its use.[55]

At the same time,

> there is no identity of a practice independent of its environment. This emphatically does not mean that the identity of a practice may be derived from its environment. Thinking "par le milieu" does not give power to the environment. [...] Spinoza might say to us, we do not know what a practice is able to become; what we know instead is that the very way we define, or address, a practice is part of the surroundings which produces its ethos.[56]

53. Witkowski, "O nową postać ekologii," 629.
54. Isabelle Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices," *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005), 187.
55. Stengers, "Introductory Notes," 185.
56. Stengers, "Introductory Notes," 187.

Stengers therefore introduces the notion of "etho-ecology": *oikos* is inextricably related to the *ethos* of a being, with how it works, how it confirms or breaks the requirements that stem from *ethos*.[57] Stengers cautions, however:

> An ethos is not contingent on its environment, its oikos; it will always belong to the being that proves capable of it. It cannot be transformed in any predictable way by transforming the environment. But no ethos, in itself containts its own meaning or masters its own reasons.[58]

It can therefore be said that ecology of practices and etho-ecology are related to *phronesis* in the sense adopted in this text. The link between practice and ethos and the environment makes it necessary to go beyond humanistic fundamentalism as understood by Krzysztof Abriszewski.[59] At the same time, the fact that the environment determines neither the shape of practice nor *ethos*, and that cognitive tools are not neutral, means that the humanities cannot be completely non-athropocentric. Someone is the subject of a phronetic reflection for which he or she takes responsibility.[60] *Phronesis* also involves thinking about "how to be" (by means of which meanings to recompose the community), a consistent non-anthropocentrism forces the sciences to abandon thinking in terms of goals.[61]

Should the Humanities Be Slow?

"A spectre is haunting our time: the spectre of the short term" – this is how Jo Guldi and David Armitage begin *The History Manifesto*.[62] Short-termism has taken root in our institutions and is finding staunch defenders, even though, in a situation of accumulating crises, there is a clear lack of long-term thinking, without which it is impossible either to make a reliable assessment of the present

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57. Isabelle Stengers, "The Cosmopolitical Proposal," in *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, trans. Liz Carey-Libbrecht (Karlsruhe, Cambridge, MA, London: ZKMI Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, The MIT Press, 2005), 997.

58. Stengers, "The Cosmopolitical," 997.

59. Krzysztof Abriszewski, "Fundamentalizm humanistyczny," in Krzysztof Abriszewski, *Wszystko otwarte na nowo. Teoria Aktora-Sieci i filozofia kultury* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2010), 143–157.

60. An example of a reflection conducted in this way, which is at the same time ethno-ecological, seems to me to be Maria Kostyszak's book *Personal Ethics*. The ethical role of place is an important element of Kostyszak's reflection, linked to her close reading of Martin Heidegger's writings.

61. See: Piątek, *Aspekty*.

62. Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

or to put forward accurate alternatives. In doing so, Guldi and Armitage are convinced that an important role in long-term thinking is played by history, which, however, like the humanities, loses out when juxtaposed with disciplines effectively linked to market needs.[63]

Guldi and Armitage's diagnosis is echoed by Stengers, whose work *Another Science is Possible: A Manifesto for Slow Science*[64] has helped to popularise the concept of "slow science." Her proposal stems from the conviction that the sciences have cognitive tasks that cannot be subordinated to a free-market understanding of productivity. The concept of "slow science" emphasises that science should be a systematic, reliable, methodical, long-term pursuit of cognitive goals. The results achieved should be subject to demanding evaluation and be publicly available. Curiosity should remain an important impetus for undertaking research. Nor can the same criterion of success be applied to all sciences.

A clear awareness of the need for long-termism is present in both Guldi and Armitage, and Stengers. It relates both to the time frame in which an issue is considered and to the long-term nature of the research being conducted. Both elements seem to me to be relevant in the context of the humanities. The work of the ontological imagination – tracing the processes of the formation and stabilisation of meanings, reflecting on which meanings to keep, which to transform and which to discard (and why) – requires one to remain in *dubito*, which is an inalienable feature of *phronesis*.

> Doubt is inscribed in social and humanistic research as a component of a peculiarly human reality, in which not only rapid developmental changes prevent the formulation of "fixed" laws, but above all the presence of "free choices" (beyond the causality that falls within the scientistic treatment of needs [...]). By contrast, uncertainty, doubt in the field of natural science sounds like an urge towards a faster resolution (in experiments) of what is the universal and unconditionally valid fixed law for all objects of "this type."[65]

As a result, neither the procedures characteristic of "fast science" nor the associated model of success, of which the orientation towards novelty is an element, can be applied to the humanities. In this context, the extent to which the humanities try to fit into the logic of "fast science," for example, through an avalanche theoretical turns, remains an open question. Paulina Abriszewska convincingly links this to the free-market logic of consumption, in which novelty generates need (e.g., attracts

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63. Guldi and Armitage, *The History*, 1, 4, 6.

64. Isabelle Stengers, *Another Science is Possible: A Manifesto for Slow Science*, trans. Stephen Muecke (Cambridge, Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018), especially chapters 3, 5 and 6.

65. Kuszyk-Bytniewska, *Działanie wobec rzeczywistości*, 106–107.

attention). A remarkable portion of the proclaimed turns refer to the same circle of authors, which does not so much reveal their apparent novelty as indicate that an inherent feature of the practice of the humanities is a dialogue with tradition.[66]

Persistence in *dubito*, dialogue with tradition, tracing networks of connections and moments of transgression can require slow and long-term work.

Festina lente, humanities!

Translated by Jarosław Sawiuk

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66. See: Paulina Abriszewska, "Stereotyp zwrotu, inflacja przełomów we współczesnej humanistyce," in *"Zwroty" badawcze w humanistyce. Konteksty poznawcze, kulturowe i społeczno-instytucjonalne*, ed. Jacek Kowalewski and Wojciech Piasek (Olsztyn: Instytut Filozofii Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, 2010), 45–61.

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